In the Claims

1. (currently amended) A system for monitoring usage of a utility at a location remote from a utility company supplying the utility, said system comprising:

a) a meter reading module connected to an existing utility meter for determining an amount of usage at the remote location and generating a data signal indicative of the determined amount of usage; [[and]]

b) an existing resident PC ~~a communication device~~ located at the remote location connected through a port in said PC to said meter reading module for receiving and storing usage information; and ~~connectable to the internet for receiving and storing the data signal from said meter reading module and transmitting the data signal to the central location, wherein the central location is able to communicate with said communication device via the internet for receiving the data signal from said communication device and determining an amount of usage of the utility,~~

c) said PC having a resident program for automatically initiating and performing data transfer via an established internet connection of said PC to a server of the utility, said program working in the background and unnoticed by a computer user of said PC during a login session to transmit stored usage information to said server of said utility.

2. (currently amended) The system as recited in Claim 1, wherein said meter reading module is connected to said PC ~~communication device~~ via one of a hardwired connection, X-10 technology or sent over existing telephone lines at a frequency that does

not interfere with other regular telephone communications.

3. (original) The system as recited in Claim 2, wherein said hardwired connection is formed by existing electric wiring at the remote location.

4. (original) The system as recited in Claim 2, wherein said X10 technology is wireless.

5. (canceled)

6. (currently amended) The system as recited in Claim 1, wherein the central location includes a processor for analyzing the data signal, generating a bill based upon a determined amount of usage and transmitting the bill to said PC ~~communication device~~ in the form of one of an e-mail message, Internet browser or other Internet related technologies.

7. (original) The system as recited in Claim 1, wherein said meter reading module is connected to one of an electrical, gas or water meter.

8. (original) The system as recited in Claim 7, further comprising an encoder device connected between said meter reading module and said gas meter.

9. (original) The system as recited in Claim 7, further comprising an encoder device connected between said meter reading module and said water meter.

10. (original) The system as recited in Claim 1, further comprising a plurality of meter reading modules, each of said plurality of meter reading modules reading a respective meter for determining utility usage within a respective residence at the remote

location.

11. (currently amended) The system as recited in Claim 6, wherein payment of the bill received from the processor is payable from said PC ~~communication device~~ at the remote location.

12. (currently amended) The system as recited in Claim 11 [[12]], wherein payment of the bill by said PC ~~communication device~~ at the remote location is performed automatically over the Internet via online banking protocols or other internet related payment technologies.

13. (currently amended) A method of monitoring usage of a utility at a location remote from a utility company supplying the utility, said method comprising the steps of:

a) connecting a meter reading module to an existing [[a]] utility meter;

b) connecting the meter reading module to a port of a resident personal computer ~~communication device~~ located at the remote location;

c) reading the meter by the meter reading module;

d) determining an amount of usage at the remote location;

e) generating a data signal indicative of the determined usage by the meter reading module;

f) transferring ~~providing~~ the data signal to said personal computer ~~the communication device located at the remote location for eventual transmission to the~~

~~central location.~~ ;

g) said personal computer storing usage information;

h) said personal computer using a resident program for automatically initiating and performing data transfer via an established internet connection of said personal computer to a server of said utility, said program working in the background and unnoticed by a user of said personal computer during a login session to transmit stored usage information to said server of said utility.

14. (canceled)

15. (currently amended) The method as recited in Claim 13 [[14]], wherein said personal computer ~~the communication device~~ stores the data signal from said meter reading module within a buffer therein prior to transmission to the central location for transmission.

16. (currently amended) The method as recited in Claim 13, wherein said step of connecting the meter reading module to said personal computer ~~the communication device~~ is performed via one of a hardwired connection, X-10 technology or sent over existing telephone lines at a frequency that does not interfere with other regular telephone communications.

17. (original) The method as recited in Claim 16, wherein the hardwired connection is formed by existing electric wiring at the remote location.

18. (original) The method as recited in Claim 16, wherein said X10 technology

is wireless.

19. (canceled)

20. (original) The method as recited in Claim 18, further comprising the step of generating a bill at the central location based upon a determined amount of usage.

21. (currently amended) The method as recited in Claim 20, further comprising the step of transmitting the bill to said personal computer ~~the communication device~~ in the form of one of an e-mail message, Internet browser or other Internet related technologies.

22. (original) The method as recited in Claim 13, wherein said step of connecting the meter reading module connects the meter reading module one of an electrical, gas or water meter.

23. (currently amended) The method as recited in Claim 22, further comprising the step of connecting an encoder device between the meter reading module and ~~the gas~~ meter.

24. (canceled)

25. (currently amended) The method as recited in Claim 13, wherein said step of connecting the meter reading module connects a plurality of meter reading modules to a respective on of a plurality of meters for determining utility usage within a respective residence at the remote location, using a single personal computer for monitoring usage of multiple usage sites.

26. (currently amended) The method as recited in Claim 20, further comprising the step of paying the generated bill received from the central location from said personal computer ~~the communication device~~ at the remote location.

27. (original) The method as recited in Claim 26, wherein said step of paying the bill is performed automatically over the Internet via online banking protocols or other internet related payment technologies.

28. (new) The system as recited in Claim 1 having means for said server to use off the net technology to send a signal to a modem of said PC when said PC is turned on but is not connected to the Internet to initiate a connection of said PC to the Internet by dialing an internet service provider to obtain transfer of usage data from said PC to said server.

29. (new) The method as recited in Claim 13 in which said server uses off the net technology to send a signal to a modem of said PC when said PC is turned on but is not connected to the Internet to initiate a connection of said PC to the Internet by dialing an internet service provider to obtain transfer of usage data from said PC to said server.